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In the 19th century, educated people scoffed at the idea that spirits of the dead could return and appear to the living, and put down all ghost-stories either as deliberate lies or superstitious mistakes. Nowadays, however, the opinion of many educated and scientific people has changed on this subject. Of course a great many ghost-stories have been proved to be mere inventions or the delusions of ignorant and superstitious persons; but on careful investigation, it has been proved that many strange experiences really happen, which cannot be explained as falsehoods or mere illusions.

And wise people hold that simply to deny the appearance of ghosts as impossible and to call all ghost-stories lies and delusions, is unscientific; real experiences of this kind should be scientifically investigated, and, if possible, explained. Now it is proved as a fact that people have seen, and do see, at times figures exactly like those of friends who have died. The question is, are these appearances really the spirits of their dead friends, or something else? It is common for some people when they are ill, or nervously overwrought, to have what are called spectral illusions." They see figures of people and things that are not really there as we do sometimes when in delirium with fever.

Such appearances are "illusions" because they are not real, and "spectral" because we seem to see them with our eyes. They are, in fact, a kind of waking dream. While we are dreaming, the dream seems real; yet it is all in our own minds and corresponds to nothing real outside us. So in certain states of bad health, we may seem to see with our eyes figures and images that exist only in our own minds. Many true ghost-stories may be explained

in this way. The appearances are not really spirits or anything outside us, but simply spectral illusion.

The ghost-story is true, because the person really saw the figure and did not make the story up; but what he saw was not a “ghost”, but a thought-image in his own mind. But this does not explain all such strange experiences.

There are many true stories of people seeing the figure of a friend who at the moment was really dying at a distance, even though they did not know the friend was even ill.

We cannot explain all these stories as mere coincidences. There must be some connection between the mind of the dying friend and the person who sees the vision, that makes such an impression on the mind of the latter that he seems to see the form of the dying man before his eyes. It is now generally admitted that one mind can directly influence another mind without the help of the physical senses.

This mysterious power is called “telepathy”, which means literally “feeling at a distance,” (as “telegraph” means “writing at a distance”). Such a vision is probably telepathic; and the image of the dying friend, though not a disembodied spirit, is an illusion caused by the influence of the mind of the dying man on the mind of the friend who sees the illusion. There are well authenticated cases of such vision of people already dead, which may be due to the telepathic influence of the dead person’s mind on that of the living. Many learned scientists to-day, like Sir Oliver Lodge, believe in such “ghosts”.